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New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Enkhbayar (Mongolia), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**High-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action**

**Agenda item 52 (*continued*)**

**Groups of countries in special situations**

**(b) Specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries: outcome of the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation**

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/165)**

**Draft resolution (A/63/L.3*)**

**The Acting President**: I call on His Excellency Mr. Park In-kook, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Korea.

**Mr. Park In-kook** (Republic of Korea): I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this important meeting in a timely fashion. I also wish to express my appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the insightful report (A/63/165) before us. I believe that the report will serve to guide us well. It succinctly summarizes the progress made, the lessons learned and the constraints encountered in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Five years ago, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the participants at the International Ministerial Conference came up with a comprehensive road map to galvanize international solidarity and partnership to assist landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). The outcome of the Conference, the Almaty Declaration and Programme of Action, reflected the strong commitment of the international community to address the special needs of and challenges faced by landlocked developing countries, as called for in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

In that regard, my delegation takes note of the Secretary-General's overall assessment that, over the past five years, landlocked and transit developing countries, with the support of their development partners, have made tangible progress in implementing the specific actions agreed upon in the Almaty Programme of Action.

As a nation that has struggled against the poverty trap during the last several decades, the Republic of Korea sympathizes with the hardships of the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and is committed to supporting their efforts to achieve sustainable development. The new Government of the Republic of Korea has made contributing to the international community as a trusted partner one of the pillars of its foreign policy. To that end, we are strengthening our role in official development assistance (ODA) programmes.

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Since 2000, our ODA has tripled in volume, with our assistance to Africa increasing threefold over the past three years. We now plan to triple our current ODA to reach over $3 billion by the end of 2015. As ODA remains the major source of funding for infrastructure development in landlocked countries, this record scale-up of our ODA volume will contribute to helping those countries to overcome geographical impediments and pave the way for tangible economic growth and prosperity.

Trade has long been recognized as the engine for development. The Republic of Korea has long utilized trade as a locomotive for our economic growth. Against this backdrop, we are well aware of the pivotal role that trade can play in the a country's development. In this context, my Government extends duty-free and quota-free access to least developed countries. At present, 16 out of 31 landlocked developing countries enjoy the programme my Government provides. We will also increase our contribution to the Integrated Framework for LDCs and will expand our training programmes on the rules and regulations of the World Trade Organization.

Efficient transport infrastructure and services are prerequisites for the development of landlocked developing countries and will facilitate their integration into the international trading system and the larger global economy. However, there are still large gaps in terms of financing that cannot be addressed without the involvement of the private sector. To galvanize the flow of private capital into infrastructure development, last year the Korean Government hosted the Ministerial Conference on Public-Private Partnerships for Infrastructure Development. The Ministerial Conference on Transport held in Korea in 2006 was yet another effort of my Government to contribute to the cause of infrastructure development.

The digital divide also remains of major concern for landlocked developing countries, with only 2.9 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2006. If this gap continues to widen, it may evolve into a serious obstacle that prevents landlocked developing countries from virtually engaging in the international economic system, which is increasingly dependent on information and communication technologies. In this regard, the Republic of Korea is ready to do its part to bridge the digital divide by sharing the technology and know-how that have helped us to enjoy the largest concentration of broadband Internet users in the world.

All in all, this midterm review shows that, although some progress has been made, much more needs to be done to fulfil the commitments we pledged to keep in the Almaty Programme of Action. The development of landlocked developing countries cannot be realized through the efforts of any single player. Rather, it requires the joint efforts of landlocked and transit developing countries, the international community and the United Nations.

I can assure the Assembly that the Republic of Korea, together with other development partners, will stand firmly with landlocked developing countries. We will support their noble endeavours to overcome the special problems caused by their lack of territorial access to the sea and their remoteness and isolation from world markets.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to Mr. Yao Wenlong, representative of China.

**Mr. Yao Wenlong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation offers its congratulations on the successful convening of this meeting. It associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and would like to express its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Diarra and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States for the all they have done in preparation for this meeting.

Since the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action began five years ago, landlocked developing countries have, thanks to the vigorous support of the international community, including the transit developing countries, and by virtue of their own unremitting efforts, made noticeable progress in their economic and social development. The Secretary-General's report (A/63/165) shows that, for landlocked developing countries, between 2003 and 2006, gross domestic product, foreign direct investment, and official development assistance (ODA) grew by an annual average of 8 per cent, 11.55 per cent and 21.4 per cent, respectively — higher than the averages for the developing countries as a group in the same period. Those figures clearly prove that the Programme of Action has played an important role in promoting the economic and social development of landlocked developing countries.

What cannot be ignored, however, is the fact that there has not been a fundamental change in those countries' disadvantaged position in the world economic system. Nor has there been a fundamental improvement with respect to their special difficulties, such as inefficient transport, weak infrastructure and high costs of trade. Since 2007 in particular, three intractable problems — in the fields of finance, energy and food — erupted onto the scene in quick succession, making the development challenges facing landlocked developing countries more acute and adding to the uncertainty of their development environment.

In 2007, landlocked developing countries accounted for less than 1 per cent of international trade, constituted half of the 20 countries with the lowest human development index, and represented 9 out of the 10 countries with the world's highest per-container cost for import-export trade. What is more, the recent hikes in energy prices have significantly increased the transit transport costs of landlocked developing countries. There is still a long way to go before all objectives contained in the Programme of Action are fully met.

It is the consensus of the international community that landlocked developing countries should be assisted in attaining sustainable development. In the face of the difficulties presented by world economic development, it is of great significance that we are gathered here for the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. We should use this midterm review as an opportunity to systematically assess the implementation of the Programme of Action, comprehensively prioritize our future cooperation, push for the follow-up of relevant commitments and set out to respond to new development challenges. With that in mind, China proposes that the international community focus its attention on the following endeavours.

First, political commitments should be reaffirmed. The Almaty Programme of Action embodies the international community's firm resolve and solemn commitment to help landlocked developing countries and constitutes the specific plan of action and the basic framework of cooperation for that purpose. We must take this as central in furthering the spirit of global partnership, honouring all commitments made under the Programme of Action and comprehensively supporting the sustainable development of those countries.

Secondly, we must actively respond to challenges. The implementation of the Programme of Action should keep pace with the times. The relevant international agencies should systematically assess the impact and repercussions of new development challenges for landlocked and transit developing countries. For its part, the international community should focus on helping those two groups of countries meet such new challenges as climate change, the world economic slowdown, the turbulence in the financial markets and the surge in energy prices.

Thirdly, development assistance should be increased. Development assistance represents a crucial factor in efforts to help landlocked developing countries break out of their development difficulties. The international community, and developed donor countries in particular, should reverse the trend seen in recent years of declining rather than increasing ODA. The commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross national income (GNI) to ODA should be expeditiously translated into action, effectively increasing the share of ODA dedicated to the financing of infrastructure development and other production sectors. The scale, sustainability and predictability of funding should continue to be increased.

Fourthly, trade preferences should be augmented. Trade is an important engine for the sustainable development of landlocked developing countries. The international community should vigorously push for an early resumption of the World Trade Organization Doha Round of negotiations and an early conclusion of a package agreement that genuinely reflects the theme of development. It should continue to expand trade facilitation and preferences in favour of landlocked developing countries and, through assistance in trade and other measures, support them in building their trade capacity so that they can significantly engage in the international trade system and benefit from it.

Fifthly, cooperation mechanisms should be strengthened. Well-coordinated cooperation mechanisms constitute the institutional guarantee for the successful implementation of the Programme of Action. The international community should continue to strengthen policy coordination and information-sharing, effectively promote regional and subregional economic cooperation, vigorously support public-private cooperation and explore in depth innovative financing mechanisms. Meanwhile, the Office of the High Representative should also continue to promote

cooperation and coordination between the relevant international organizations and United Nations agencies.

China is a transit developing country, and parts of its territory have landlocked features. Some of our inland provinces have worse natural conditions than some landlocked countries. China thus has first-hand experience of the special difficulties confronting landlocked developing countries. China has always energetically supported landlocked developing countries in their development efforts, actively promoted and engaged in transit transport cooperation, continuously strengthened support measures in favour of those countries and actively honoured the commitments made under the Programme of Action.

Currently, China contributes more than 10 per cent of world economic growth, with the spillover effects providing a powerful impetus to the economic growth of neighbouring landlocked developing countries. China is active in advancing regional economic cooperation in Central Asia, North-East Asia and the Greater Mekong subregion. That cooperation benefits the landlocked developing countries in Asia. Through mechanisms such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, we have also continued to increase our support for the landlocked developing countries in Africa. At the United Nations high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals last week, Premier Wen Jiabao announced six concrete measures that we are undertaking to provide assistance within our capacity to fellow developing countries, including landlocked developing countries, in the areas of agricultural development, responding to the food crisis, personnel training, debt relief and cancellation, trade preferences and energy.

China will continue to follow the principles of equitable consultation, mutual interest and benefit and common development, to honour in full and in depth all commitments contained in the Programme of Action and to share development opportunities with landlocked developing countries in a joint effort to meet the challenges of development.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Giadalla A. Ettalhi, chairman of the delegation of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

**Mr. Ettalhi** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to express our deep appreciation for the timely holding of this meeting and to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session.

The special needs and problems confronting landlocked developing countries have been recognized by the United Nations in the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), as well as by other relevant international organizations. They include the fact that those countries do not have access to the sea and suffer isolation from international markets, which has a negative impact on their development efforts and constrains their ability to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and on their development efforts in general. That is all well known.

The Almaty Programme of Action aims to confront the challenges faced by landlocked and transit developing countries. The Programme clearly indicates that landlocked status is a challenge, not a destiny, and that international solidarity and cooperation can contribute to overcoming those difficulties and challenges. Many transit developing countries that are neighbours of landlocked developing countries bear additional burdens as a result of transit transport requirements and their need to build and strengthen the infrastructure for roads, maintenance and service programmes as well as to develop the human resources and administrative and financial systems needed for those facilities.

Therefore, the formation, strengthening and maintenance of an effective transit system pose a great challenge to landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and to other developing countries as well. This is what my country, Libya, is facing.

The costs entailed are often greater than the financial capabilities of those countries and there is no doubt that development partners can support and bolster those countries' efforts to create effective means and systems of transit transport and develop the required human resources and capabilities. We affirm that regional cooperation can play an important role in resolving the problems encountered in transit transport, making it easier and less costly by allowing for the pooling of resources and capabilities, and by coordinating and removing obstacles to cross-border passage and by guaranteeing that products have access to nearby and overseas markets. It is gratifying that the development of basic infrastructure for transit transport

is one of the national concerns of African countries. It is also among the strategic priorities of development. We support the policies and initiatives made by the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and regional economic groupings in the African continent, all of which aim to bolster the efforts of those countries and strengthen regional cooperation among them.

We confirm the need to establish and bolster effective systems for transit transport in Africa by forging effective partnerships between LLDCs and transit developing countries within the framework of regional integration. We call upon international and regional financial institutions to offer more financial and technical aid. This aid should be coordinated to develop the infrastructure of transit transport and to focus on bridging the gaps that remain in ground transport networks so as to connect landlocked countries to the rest of the African countries and give priority to the basic infrastructure needs within the framework of assistance for trade. Additionally, overseas development assistance funds allocated to building these structures should be increased.

In view of its belief in the need for African integration, Libya supports policies and initiatives that aim to connect African countries through roads and networks, as these are fundamental to the development and advancement of the productive and service sectors in landlocked countries. Additionally, they would activate trade exchange with the rest of the countries in the continent, on one hand, and trade between those countries and international markets, on the other.

Moreover, my country has undertaken a large project called the Al-Qadhafi Highway. Here, my country is working on building desert roads to landlocked countries on two axes, one in eastern Libya and one in the west of the country. We are currently devoting great efforts to implement this large project. Such efforts contribute to providing opportunities for economic and social stability. This will reduce the reasons for illegal immigration and lessen the resulting economic, social and security repercussions and risks.

In closing, my country confirms the need to support and bolster efforts made by the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, which aim to mobilize the necessary support and help implement the Almaty Programme of Action. This is also considered one of the main areas of cooperation among the countries of the South because most landlocked countries and transit countries are developing countries as well. Based on this, a successful programme of action will increase transactions among the countries of the South and will achieve the economic integration that serves the interests of all.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Maurer, chairman of the delegation of the Swiss Confederation.

**Mr. Maurer** (Switzerland): Geography may be a challenge, but it is not destiny. Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) face specific hurdles in their development that countries bordering on the sea do not. But those hurdles can be addressed, as we are doing successfully with the Almaty Declaration and Programme of Action. The Declaration and the Programme have contributed significantly to putting the special needs of LLDCs on the political agenda. This midterm review provides us with a welcome opportunity to take stock of the progress made, to analyse existing gaps and to identify the action needed to fill these gaps. The excellent report prepared by the Secretary-General and his collaborators provides a number of insights worthy of our attention.

Allow me to focus on just a few of them. First, in Almaty we underestimated the spill-over effects produced by the spectacular growth of emerging economic powerhouses. Their markets provide at least some landlocked countries with a regional alternative or complement to overseas markets. The negative effects of high transportation costs and dependence on a functioning transit corridor can be significantly reduced when these strong performers are in the immediate neighbourhood of LLDCs. The increasing sophistication of these emerging economies should also contribute, in the medium term, to nurture the diversification of the export structure of countries in the region and hence, to reduce the dependence of many LLDCs on highly volatile commodity prices.

Furthermore, it is our hope that the high export earnings of emerging markets will provide the LLDCs with additional investment capital, thus facilitating the regional integration also at the level of capital markets. The special needs of landlocked developing countries and the further strengthening of South-South trade are issues that need to be tackled in parallel. While

continuous support by all development partners to LLDCs is crucial, strong leadership by the emerging economies willing and ready to shoulder their part of the responsibility for international economic stability and prosperity is also called for.

Secondly, we have to re-emphasize the importance of freedom of transit. In the context of the ongoing negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) on trade facilitation, Switzerland and a number of LLDCs have jointly submitted a textual proposal on the clarification and improvement of Article V of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The proposal not only seeks to strengthen freedom of transit and to create discipline with regard to transit fees and charges, but also attempts to curb the discriminating effects that regional or bilateral transit agreements may have on transit, including by tackling quota systems. Ambitious wording on transit in a future WTO agreement on trade facilitation is not enough in and of itself, but it sets the stage for a much larger host of concrete trade facilitation measures all along the supply chains so as to truly establish viable, predictable and reasonably economical transit routes.

Thirdly, the Almaty Programme of Action has helped to coalesce a wide range of countries facing similar concerns under one heading — the landlocked developing countries. At the same time, transit countries and development partners have joined the process in the spirit of partnership. Yet, while the Programme has been firmly established and recognized, further progress is needed. The priorities and needs of landlocked developing countries have become further differentiated. Their starting points, comparative advantages, economic policies and transport infrastructures are developing over time in response to both world market and stronger regional integration.

It is therefore important that international organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, continue to work towards common and reliable indicators and monitoring. Reliable targets and indicators help ensure that limited resources are put to use where they are most needed in each single case. By providing an objective basis of work, they also facilitate crucial bilateral and regional cooperation on transit and other trade-related facilitation issues.

Geography can indeed be a challenge, but geography is no destiny. Switzerland, a landlocked country itself, remains deeply committed to assisting landlocked developing countries to better integrate themselves into world markets.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to the speaker from Ethiopia.

**Mr. Alemu** (Ethiopia): Allow me to begin by expressing our deep appreciation to the President for having organized this important and timely high-level meeting as part of the ongoing sixty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly, over which he is already presiding most efficiently. My delegation wishes to assure him of its readiness to render its utmost cooperation to assist him in efficiently carrying out his responsibilities in this regard, as well as in others relating to his high office.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General for his in-depth and comprehensive report on the issues that concern landlocked countries. There is no doubt that the report will make a significant contribution to these review deliberations.

We have carefully noted that the Secretary-General's report has captured in detail developments that have taken place in landlocked developing countries since the launch of the Almaty Programme of Action in 2003. As the report clearly indicates, a number of landlocked countries are giving due attention to the establishment of fundamental transit policies, while also engaging in infrastructure development. Although those countries, like all others, are adversely affected by the toll of rising food and fuel prices, their economies have also benefited from those otherwise negative surges.

The fact that the needs of landlocked countries are receiving more attention than ever before in many international forums is indeed reassuring. Certainly, their unique situation and their common predicaments in particular are becoming major items on the agenda at high-level multilateral trade discussions, such as the twelfth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held last April in Ghana, and the United Nations panel discussion on the investment needs of least-developed landlocked countries, conducted here in New York the day before yesterday. We are indeed encouraged by those positive trends.

However, in spite of those encouraging developments, landlocked countries continue to face several challenges due to their geographical handicap, which puts serious constraints on their efforts to achieve poverty reduction goals and improve the standard of living of their populations. Thus, much remains to be done in terms of mobilizing concrete support to help better address the economic predicaments faced by those countries.

As clearly reflected in the Almaty Programme of Action, the most important measures that should be taken to mitigate and do away with the difficulties of landlocked developing countries are realistic and suitable strategies crafted by those countries themselves. It is, of course, of equal importance that those countries collaborate with their neighbouring coastal States to create mutually beneficial and efficient transit transport, customs and other relevant infrastructure systems. Most of those coastal States that border landlocked countries are themselves faced with a lack of efficient infrastructure systems and do not enjoy optimal regional economic integration.

Due to the geographical distances involved and costly and cumbersome transit systems, landlocked developing countries require special market access to leverage their less competitive position in the international market. They need financial and technical assistance in their endeavours to build and overhaul major infrastructure systems, including, among others, railways, highways and dry ports. They need technical assistance in modernizing transit customs procedures.

Landlocked countries should be able to benefit from all the support they need to overcome their supply-side trade constraints. It is high time that we created the conditions to enable smooth and harmonious interplay between the Almaty Programme of Action and the World Trade Organization (WTO) Aid for Trade Initiative so as to meaningfully support the capacity of landlocked countries, most of which fall under the category of least-developed countries and suffer huge supply-side constraints.

Landlocked countries must continue to advocate for international laws and conventions to ascertain their rights to uninterrupted freedom of transit. They should strive to see improved international legal instruments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and WTO General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade instruments, particularly regarding the relationship of landlocked countries vis-à-vis their coastal neighbours. To that end, we should also engage in a concerted effort with other groupings, such as the Group of 77, to which most of us belong.

In order to better coordinate our efforts and avoid unnecessary duplication, we should also liaise effectively with our respective regional groupings in Africa, Asia and Latin America so as to solicit their valuable contributions in that important endeavour. Moreover, such collaboration could help avoid possible confusion with other, similar needs of those groupings.

Ethiopia, for its part, has ventured to take a number of steps aimed at ensuring its competitive and comparative advantages in the realm of international trade. With a combination of an agriculture-led, export-oriented strategy and an emphasis on the development of key infrastructure systems that are essential to bring about rapid growth, the country is making promising strides on both fronts. It is also focusing on achieving better export earnings and minimizing the difficulties posed by geographic barriers through an emphasis on non-traditional export items, such as flowers, which can easily be transported by air.

Thanks to the diversification of its export produce, inter alia, Ethiopia has been able to register double-digit growth in its gross domestic product over the past four years. That demonstrates Ethiopia's commitment to adhering to the ethos and principles of the Almaty Programme of Action.

The establishment of a new dry-port services enterprise earlier this year, the expansion of road networks within and along major transit corridors, the improvement of the existing old railroad system while also investing in the construction of a new one, and the overhauling of the country's telecommunications and energy sectors are among the major programmes in the overall national endeavour.

As we pointed out at the panel discussion on attracting foreign direct investment to landlocked developing countries, held here at United Nations the day before yesterday, it is important to reiterate today that the Government of Ethiopia raised and allocated its own resources to finance most of the start-up costs of all of those large-scale projects. However, in the spirit of the Almaty Programme of Action, we expect to receive timely and adequate financial and technical assistance from our development partners so as to

increase our resources for completing those important projects.

We firmly believe that this midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action should take proper stock of lessons learned in the past with a view to further galvanizing existing global partnerships that are geared to assisting landlocked countries in the light of their particular situations.

In that respect, it is worth noting that the outcome of the Africa regional meeting on the review of the Almaty Programme of Action, which took place in mid-June 2008 in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa reflected the fact that, among other things, in order for the Almaty Programme of Action to be more concrete in implementation, concerned bodies such as the Office of the High Representative and regional financial mechanisms should take the lead in advocating and contributing to the investment of new resources that are essential to addressing the needs of landlocked countries.

The regional meeting also underlined the importance of coordinating our efforts with the group of least developed countries, our World Trade Organization negotiators in Geneva, and particularly such regional groupings as the Africa Group, in order to avoid the unproductive duplication of efforts and, at the same time, strike the right balance in advocating for our common interests.

*Mr. Abani (Niger), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Finally, my delegation wishes to seize this opportunity to reassure the Assembly that Ethiopia will do whatever it can to implement fully and in an unfettered manner the Almaty Programme of Action, as well as the outcome of this important review deliberation. Together, we should strive for the concrete realization of the many ideals and proposals put forth since the inception of the Almaty Programme of Action. We must also work in unison to give further substance to some of the positive results that we have already brought about.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. T. Vance McMahan, representative of the United States of America.

**Mr. McMahan** (United States of America): The outcome document of the midterm review and the Secretary-General's detailed, comprehensive report on the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action (A/63/165) provide excellent bases for our deliberations this week.

We note that the outcome document and the report affirm the value of regional and subregional cooperation and of accession to multilateral conventions, transport policy reform, and trade facilitation measures including,

> "the commercialization and liberalization of transport services and efforts to improve institutional, procedural, regulatory and managerial systems and reduce excessive paperwork and red tape requirements" (*A/63/165, para. 81*).

Those reforms are, in our view, essential for effective participation in the world economy and for deriving full benefit from international assistance.

In 13 landlocked developing countries today, the United States, through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), is providing national development strategies with unprecedented levels of assistance, the transfer of know-how and technology, and collaborative institution-building. Our partnerships are aimed at transformation and at achieving a permanent boost to rates of economic growth.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation currently has signed large grant agreements — called compacts — with 10 landlocked developing countries for over $1.9 billion. In Mongolia, the MCC is funding a $188 million project to rebuild and commercialize the national railroad system. Another $23-million project is aimed at strengthening the legal infrastructure for property rights near Mongolia's rapidly growing urban centres. In conjunction with the Asian Development Bank, $25 million will go to establishing a vocational training network for over 30 career paths essential to building an urban, industrial-based economy.

In Armenia, the MCC is providing $235 million to increase economic performance in the agriculture sector through strategic investments in rural roads and irrigated agriculture. The compact with Armenia will directly benefit approximately 750,000 people, or 75 per cent of the rural population.

The MCC is also working with Mali to transform agricultural production, reducing vulnerability to drought and targeting agro-processing and higher-value crops. The Government's $235-million Alatona Irrigation Project, financed by MCC, will create 16,000 hectares of new irrigation-fed agricultural land. Such infrastructure improvement will be accompanied by programmes to improve land tenure, establish agricultural credit and lending, and enhance water management. Another $184 million from the MCC will be used to rebuild Mali's airport in order to expand the country's access to trade.

The MCC initiative is about helping our development partners achieve their national priorities based upon common values. MCC programmes are premised on the expectation that once the foundation of accountable public management and a regulatory environment that encourages private economic activity are in place, investment in people and infrastructure will have a permanent and transforming impact on economic growth. We see it as a partnership in which large-scale external assistance for infrastructure and ambitious projects will succeed because the conditions for lasting national development are present.

MCC does not replace our traditional foreign assistance to landlocked developing countries; rather, it supplements it. In 2006, landlocked developing countries received a total of $4.3 billion in economic assistance from the United States, including the MCC disbursements. The United States also provides assistance to landlocked countries for implementing and strengthening macroeconomic and business and investment reform. In the past year, our teams provided recommendations to Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda on streamlining business regulation.

In conjunction with the World Bank, the Business Environment Improvement Project launched by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) assisted the Kyrgyz Republic with an ambitious programme of administrative change and regulatory simplification. The result was that the Kyrgyz Republic jumped from 99 to 68 in the World Bank's *Doing Business* ranking, landing third among the top 10 reformers for 2008.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a USAID collaborative programme with the Government established one-stop business registration and customs documentation. The time it takes to register a company fell from over a month to as little as three days, and waiting times at the border dropped by 75 per cent.

The United States Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) also facilitates investment in landlocked developing countries. An initial investment by OPIC of approximately $15 million has leveraged another $90 million in African capital for the rehabilitation and improvement of the Nacala corridor in south-eastern Africa. The transaction includes significant port improvements and will contribute to a seamless multimodal transportation system running from Mozambique into Malawi and Zambia. OPIC also provides political risk insurance, as in the example of $142 million in coverage for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the second longest in the world.

We recognize the challenges faced by landlocked developing countries — the high cost of transportation and of inputs, the corresponding impact on export competitiveness and dependence on regional neighbours for access to overseas markets. We believe, however, that it is fair to say that the geographic position of landlocked developing countries, their centrality, can also be an advantage.

A multilateral framework for cooperation in transit and trade, infrastructure development and regional approaches to problem-solving should help landlocked developing countries explore possibilities for competitive advantage and profitable niche markets. In our view, the Almaty Programme of Action is an important and necessary initiative for realizing the full potential of landlocked developing countries and achieving and sustaining the Millennium Development Goals.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Hussain Haroon, chairman of the delegation of Pakistan.

**Mr. Haroon** (Pakistan): Pakistan welcomes the convening of the high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. We view this process and its outcome as an important step towards meaningfully addressing the special needs and concerns of landlocked developing States. We are confident that this timely endeavour will translate into a comprehensive course of correction exercise aimed at learning from past experiences with a view to guiding our future work.

We meet at a difficult time to carry out this important midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, which addresses the special needs of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) within a new global framework for transit transport cooperation for landlocked and transit developing countries. Only recently, we carried out two other equally important reviews at the United Nations on Africa's development needs and its achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The message from those high-level engagements was clear. Implementation is the biggest challenge and lack of finances remains the greatest obstacle to realizing the development promises and commitments made here.

The unfolding global development emergency manifested through the triple crises of food, fuel and finance is making the implementation challenge even more complex and daunting, not just for the LLDCs, but also for their transit neighbours, which are often of broadly similar economic structures and faced with similar scarcities of resources.

An effective strategy to improve transit transport systems has also become particularly relevant in the wake of rising commodity and high oil prices. A coherent strategy should enable significant economies of scale by using trade as an instrument for achieving development objectives through improved shares for both landlocked and transit developing countries in global trade.

Pakistan strongly supports the LLDCs in their quest for greater and across the board recognition of their special needs, both financial and technical. We also remain committed to helping them within our limited means to overcome the formidable obstacles and pursue their development goals. However, the requirements of establishing and maintaining efficient transit transport systems are of such magnitude that landlocked and transit developing countries cannot accomplish much on their own. A concerted effort is therefore required to evolve policies and mechanisms which can generate the financial resources required to invest in the transport infrastructure projects. Such investments need increased financial assistance from the development partners, donor countries and international financial and development institutions.

Similarly, an early, successful and development-oriented completion of the World Trade Organization Doha Round of trade negotiations, allowing the removal of distortions in the global trading regime and providing enhanced market access, particularly to the LLDCs, has never been more important and urgently needed as it is now. The continuing impasse in the Doha trade negotiations is alarming and a source of serious concern.

Pakistan, as a transit developing country, actively participates in the process of the Almaty Programme of Action and remains committed to providing easy, efficient and expeditious transit access to our landlocked neighbours — especially Afghanistan — to help them expand their international trade. In fact, promoting regional connectivity and making Pakistan a regional transit hub is an integral part and central pillar of our national vision for the trade and transport sectors. Pakistan's location at the crossroads of South, Central and West Asia is indeed helpful in that regard.

To that end, as part of our national trade corridor programme, Pakistan is not only improving and upgrading its existing logistics and transport infrastructure, including highways and the railway system, but has also embarked on constructing new road networks, seaports, airports and other related facilities. Various linkage roads up to Gwadar, a modern port in western Pakistan, are also being constructed. With the commissioning of the Gwadar port, Pakistan will be able to provide dedicated, efficient and cost-effective transit trade and port facilities to our landlocked neighbours, including the latest facilities for cargo vessels at par with any modern port.

On the services sector, the Government of Pakistan is in the process of revamping the entire customs procedure, including the introduction of the Customs Reform Project. The national trade corridor programme provides specific targets and timelines for achievement in all critical areas, including trade facilitation.

Before I conclude, let me also avail myself of this opportunity to thank Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and his team for their good work in making our deliberations productive and useful. I would also like to thank Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan for successfully facilitating the intergovernmental consultations to finalize the outcome of the midterm review meeting.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Zahir Tanin, chairman of the delegation of Afghanistan.

**Mr. Tanin** (Afghanistan): I am pleased to address the high-level meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. I would like to convey my thanks to the President of the General Assembly for his efforts to ensure the continuing support of the international community to the landlocked countries. I also commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his strong leadership and focus on the implementation of the Programme, and express my appreciation to High Representative Cheick Sidi Diarra and his Office for their excellent preparatory work for the meeting.

Since the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action five years ago, many landlocked and transit countries, with the help of their development partners, have achieved certain progress towards realizing the aims of that document. However, due to a variety of impediments facing the landlocked countries, many of them, including Afghanistan, have not yet been able to fully use trade as an effective instrument to achieve their development goals.

Among the many areas of progress in Afghanistan, first, the Government of Afghanistan has expanded the role of the private sector to invest in transport and transit infrastructure. We have established the Afghan National Trade and Transit Facilitation Committee. In that Committee, public and private representatives deliberate on major trade, transit and transport policies and procedures and together decide on relevant courses of action.

Secondly, it has simplified and standardized the documents and forms used for border transactions. Thirdly, it has taken steps to modernize border crossings by automating, purchasing modern equipment and constructing new facilities.

Fourthly, in 2007 and 2008, the Government, with the assistance of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, conducted surveys to identify transit challenges at the borders in cross-border control zones and adopted procedures to address them.

Fifthly, it has begun negotiations with neighbouring countries to address the shared challenges that increase the cost of goods and services to the detriment of traders and consumers. As a result, we resolved our long-standing problem with Pakistan of the transit and trans-shipment of fresh Afghan products through the Wagah border to India.

In the priority area of infrastructure development and maintenance of the Almaty Programme of Action, first, Afghanistan is building new roads. In the past seven years, Afghanistan has repaired or built nearly 7,000 kilometres of existing and new roads, including the ring road and secondary roads. By 2010, we hope to complete the national ring road and connect it to our neighbours to the North, South, West and East.

Secondly, Afghanistan is building new railroads. As part of a copper mine contract with a Chinese consortium, a railway system connecting Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan is planned. Afghanistan is also working on joining the trans-Asia railway. In addition, the seventh Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications of the Economic Cooperation Organization confirmed that the Istanbul-Teheran-Islamabad railway will pass through Afghanistan.

Thirdly, we are improving our air infrastructure. In the past few years, three private passenger and two Afghan air cargo companies have begun operation in Afghanistan. Also, we have just completed the construction of the new Kabul international terminal and the upgrading of its runway. We are also renovating and upgrading seven airports in other parts of the country.

Fourthly, we are improving communications, which is the biggest success story of Afghanistan. In 2002, there were an estimated 38,000 landlines. Today, there are almost 6 million telephone subscribers in the country, as well as four providers and an investment of nearly $1 billion dollars. By the end of 2009, we will have completed the national fibre-optic line and connected it to two neighbouring countries. The improvement in communications services will allow better tracking of information of import and transit cargo and connectivity to the region and the world.

Fifthly, we are constructing pipelines and transferring electric energy. The agreement to transfer natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan has been finalized. In addition, last month, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to establish the secretariat of the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and

Trade Project in Kabul to expedite the transfer of over 1,300 megawatts of electricity from the two Central Asian countries to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the priority area of monitoring and follow-up on agreements, Afghanistan is again joining conventions, such as the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets, to meet standards and accomplish the reform of the transit and freight sectors, as well as following up on Afghanistan's membership of the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations.

Despite those areas of progress, Afghanistan has been facing many challenges in meeting the objectives of the Almaty Programme of Action, notably with the much-needed support of the international and regional communities.

First, while we appreciate the financial support of the international community towards improving our transport and transit infrastructure, a significant portion of the donor pledges has still not been delivered. Furthermore, much of that aid is being delivered without full regard for the goals of the Afghan Government and the Almaty Programme of Action. Therefore, we urge the international community to increase its assistance to Afghanistan in the following priority areas of the Almaty Programme of Action: to help extend our roads to complete the missing links of the regional network; to further upgrade our roads and improve maintenance capabilities; to improve our existing ports and establish new dry ports; to build a railway system; and to modernize our airports.

Secondly, Afghanistan has concluded a significant number of bilateral and trilateral agreements with most of our neighbours since 2002. Afghanistan has joined most major regional organizations and will continue to work towards meeting the objectives of the Almaty Programme of Action on regional cooperation. Unfortunately, only a few of those treaties have been implemented, owing to lack of political confidence among countries in the region or lack of capacity and infrastructure. In short, we have yet to reap the benefit of those agreements.

To move forward, Afghanistan recommends renewed attention to international and regional partnerships. The Almaty Programme of Action can be implemented only through those partnerships. That spirit is clearly highlighted in the Almaty Declaration. The Almaty Programme of Action calls on bilateral and multilateral donors alike to increase financial and technical assistance to landlocked developing countries, particularly those emerging from conflicts. It also contains comprehensive directions for donors and the international community to assist landlocked and transit countries. Moreover, the Programme encourages developing and developed countries to enhance cooperation on the basis of mutual interest. Any improvement in trade with Afghanistan promises great benefits to partnering countries as well.

Regional economic cooperation is becoming an integral part of the globalization strategies of almost all neighbouring countries of Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan now has a unique opportunity to realize its potential as a land bridge between Central Asia, South Asia and the West Asian region. We are aware of our responsibilities to work with our neighbours towards policies and institutional mechanisms to translate that potential into concrete regional projects, but we would like to encourage others to work with us at a similar pace and in the same spirit.

My delegation carefully reviewed the draft outcome document of the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action (A/63/L.3), which contains important recommendations and strongly appeals to the international community and donors to increase their level of support, particularly official development assistance, to the landlocked and transit developing countries. It encourages the landlocked and developing transit countries to take a proactive approach towards bilateral and multilateral cooperation. If the recommendations remain only words on paper, we may not witness a qualitative change; but if undertaken in an honest, serious, effective and constructive manner, those recommendations can improve the nature of trade and transit and fully realize the objectives of the Almaty Programme of Action.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hjalmar Hannesson, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Iceland.

**Mr. Hannesson** (Iceland): We welcome the efforts made by the Secretary-General to ensure effective preparation for the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action, and thank him for his comprehensive report (A/63/165) on the implementation of the Programme. I would also like

thank Ambassador Takasu, Permanent Representative of Japan, for his excellent work in facilitating the consultations on the declaration (A/63/L.3) to be adopted at the end of this meeting.

There have been a number of positive developments in the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) in recent years, and fairly consistent economic growth. However, the report of the Secretary-General shows that considerable efforts are needed in the nearest future to improve the competitiveness of the LLDCs in order to strengthen their participation in the global economy. We are fully committed to the implementation of the five priorities of the Almaty Programme of Action. We recognize that the specific situations of those countries, with their lack of access to the sea and distances from world markets, make eradication of poverty even more challenging. Last year, 41 per cent of our bilateral development assistance was directed to LLDCs in Africa and another 30 per cent to important transit developing countries in Africa. We are concerned that the LLDCs continue to build an unsuitable level of external debt. Iceland is a supporter and financier of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, as well as the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, both of which have been important for many of the LLDCs.

More is needed on financing for development. The forthcoming meeting in Doha on financing for development will test the resolve of the international community, and Iceland, for its part, aims to be among the top official development assistance contributors, having already doubled its budget for development cooperation in the past four years. We will continue to direct most of our bilateral development assistance to the LDCs in Africa, many of which are either landlocked or important transit countries.

Women play a fundamental role in development, and experience has shown that support for the education, health and economic activities of women has a multiplier effect for their communities. For that reason, we have increasingly directed our development cooperation towards gender specific projects. That has been done through our bilateral programmes in the partner countries and through support to the work of the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Aid for trade, which Iceland supports, is an important initiative that can reduce the adverse effect of the LLDC's geographic location and should be part of a broader development policy for the LLDCs. We will continue to advocate the increased liberalization of international trade. The setback of the Doha Development Round could slow down the integration of the LLDCs into the world economy. That makes it even more urgent than ever that we facilitate market access for goods originating in those countries and ensure, at all levels, a broad range of trade facilitation measures. It is our duty to do what we can to offset the high transit and transport costs facing businesses in the LLDCs.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Don Pramudwinai, chairman of the delegation of the Kingdom of Thailand.

**Mr. Pramudwinai** (Thailand): This year marks two important midpoints, one relates to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the other to the Almaty Programme of Action. Last week, during the general debate and during the high-level meeting on the MDGs, one of the issues often mentioned was poverty eradication. That issue is clearly very important and the United Nations dedicated one round-table meeting on that particular issue during the high-level meeting on the MDGs.

A number of perspectives to overcome poverty and hunger were raised during such meetings and one among many is opportunity, that is, the opportunity to connect to the world and the opportunity to play a role in the global community. It is clear that being provided with opportunity would help developing countries that are not yet on track to achieve the MDGs to be able to eradicate poverty, ensure better livelihoods and thus achieve the MDGs by the target year of 2015. In that regard, the global partnership for development has been highlighted as a mechanism to provide such opportunity.

Besides Africa, whose development needs were at the centre of the discussions over the past few weeks, there are also the special needs of the landlocked developing countries, which deserve unabated attention from the international community to ensure the realization of their opportunity and potential. As a neighbour of a landlocked developing country, we are well aware of the role that a transit country should play. Thus, we appreciate the efforts made by the Secretary-General to organize this high-level meeting

to review the progress at the midpoint of the Almaty Programme of Action, which, indeed, highlights the key role of partnership between landlocked and transit developing countries and other partners in creating opportunity and access to global markets and connectivity.

Thailand believes that opportunity is important for ensuring development and prosperity. Thus, Thailand has extended cooperation on transport linkages to its neighbouring countries through regional, subregional and bilateral cooperation, in line with the priorities set out in the Almaty Programme of Action.

To facilitate transit transport and eliminate non-physical barriers we have provided special privileges to neighbouring countries by exempting customs on commercial goods that are transited through Thailand. Under the umbrella of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), member States have also worked on a number of agreements on transportation and communication, for example, the Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Goods in Transit, signed in 1998, and the Framework Agreement on Multimodal Transport in 2005.

On infrastructure, Thailand has placed great importance on the construction of transport links within the region under several regional and subregional cooperation agreements. The network of transportation linkages will facilitate further regional integration in economic and social areas, which will ultimately nurture the greater sense of community among countries. At present, the Asian Highway Network has made great progress with the development of the East-West, North-South and Southern Economic Corridors under the Greater Mekong Subregion framework. Once realized, the Singapore-Kunming Rail Link under the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation will link ASEAN members with China. Under the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, a study on the development of transport infrastructure and logistics between South and Southeast Asia was conducted by the Asian Development Bank to facilitate trade and transport across the Bay of Bengal.

During the third Greater Mekong Subregion Summit in Laos, the Thai Prime Minister proposed initiatives for tourism loops in order to boost economic activity through tourism by connecting historical and cultural heritage sites in the cities along the existing corridors in the Mekong subregion. This route can complement existing tourist destinations in the ASEAN region and those of the Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand Growth Triangle.

As the economic corridors under the Greater Mekong Subregion are due for completion in 2015, Thailand is of the view that it would be useful for the relevant member countries of subregional cooperation frameworks, such as the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, Greater Mekong Subregion, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation and Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand Growth Triangle, together with their development partners, to consider cooperation to identify and expedite missing-link projects that would complete or significantly enhance transportation networks, not only within the Greater Mekong Subregion but beyond, including South Asia and the whole of continental Southeast Asia.

On the bilateral basis, Thailand has been providing financial assistance to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, our landlocked neighbour, as well as to Cambodia and Myanmar in projects that will help strengthen transport connectivity. However, I will confine myself in the role of Thailand as a transit country. Thailand has provided financial assistance, both grants and soft loans, to Laos for the construction of transport infrastructure. On road developments, our assistance has been provided for building a road linking Huay Sai-Loung Num Tha in Laos, which is a part of route No. 3 of the North-South Economic Corridor under the Great Mekong Subregion framework. Currently, we are considering assistance to rehabilitate route No. 11 in Vientiane. On the development of Mekong bridges, Thailand worked with Laos in utilizing the loan from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation to construct the second Mekong bridge. Thailand has also provided financial assistance to build the third Mekong bridge and is cooperating with China to build the fourth Mekong bridge.

Apart from the progress made in road and bridge development, Thailand continues to play an active role in strengthening other modes of connectivity with Laos. We contributed financial resources and expertise to support the development of a rail link from Nong Kai to Tha Na Lang, which was completed in April

2007. Moreover, we have offered a soft loan for the project to improve the Pakse airport. In addition, both sides are working on an assessment on the rehabilitation of Savannakhet airport, which is a part of the Asian Development Bank's East-West Economic Corridors project under the Greater Mekong Subregion Framework.

Providing opportunity in term of linkages will create direct people-to-people contacts, which would help people to have better accesses in the economic and social spheres and improve their livelihoods as a whole. In addition, those linkages could have a role in bridging the development gap through accessibility to global markets. That would enable landlocked developing countries to gain more economic benefits from globalization, reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs.

On our part, Thailand will continue to actively support the development of transport links to improve the living standards of the people in the Mekong subregion. In the Asia-Pacific region, Thailand appreciates the efforts by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, which is the regional arm of the Organization, in connecting our members in the region and creating opportunities to make it possible to have greater access to markets.

However, there is more to be done. Thailand also wishes to urge other development partners to participate in transport connectivity development, in terms of both technical and financial assistance relating to infrastructure development. Several programmes and projects still need more funding support. Moreover, there are imperative needs to strengthen administration, management and the sustainable use of infrastructure while taking into account cost reductions, operation and maintenance, safety, the mitigation of social and environmental impacts and the fair distribution of benefits to the people.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Steve Dick Tennyson Matenje, chairman of the delegation of Malawi.

**Mr. Matenje** (Malawi): Let me begin by congratulating the President for convening this important meeting on the midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/63/165) on the progress made, the lessons learned and the constraints encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action. Allow me also to thank Ambassador Yukio Takasu of Japan for his facilitation in the drafting of the outcome document for this meeting, as well as the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States for the role it continues to play in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Malawi is both landlocked and least developed. Clearly, like other countries in a similar situation, it faces unique and daunting challenges. Those include rising oil costs, lack of direct access to the sea and remoteness from major international markets, all of which result in prohibitive transport costs and formidable obstacles to Malawi's import and export trade. Unless those challenges are addressed urgently, landlocked developing countries, including Malawi, will remain uncompetitive in the global economy and the development gap between them and the rest of the world will continue to widen, resulting in their perpetual dependence on foreign aid.

As Malawi's President Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika often says, a good friend is the one you walk with and not the one you carry on your shoulders — because when you trip, you both fall. Accordingly, we urge our development partners, as good friends, to walk with us and not to carry us on their shoulders on our journey to economic prosperity and independence. We ask them to do so by assisting us to remove obstacles to our import and export trade so that we can create the needed wealth we so much need to reduce poverty in our country.

It was precisely for that reason that, in 2003, the United Nations adopted the Almaty Programme of Action as a reflection of the commitment of the international community to address the special needs and problems of landlocked developing countries, as called for in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The objective of the Programme of Action was to establish a new global framework for transit transport cooperation for landlocked developing countries. Among other things, the Programme of Action aims at securing access by landlocked developing countries to and from the sea by all means and at reducing costs associated with their import and export trade. A critical aspect in achieving those

objectives is the provision of transport infrastructure to both landlocked and transit developing countries.

In that regard, Malawi's growth and development strategy identifies transport infrastructure development as one of the Government's six key priority areas for achieving economic growth in the medium term. Accordingly, the Government of Malawi is vigorously pursuing a multimodal inland transport system to improve road, rail, air and inland water transportation, with a view to facilitating internal trade as well as import and export trade.

With regard to inland water transportation, the Governments of Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia have concluded a memorandum of understanding to develop and implement a waterway project known as the Shire-Zambezi Waterway Project, which aims at connecting Malawi, Zambia and the hinterland of Mozambique to the sea through the Shire River in southern Malawi and Mozambique and the Zambezi River in Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The Shire-Zambezi waterway was used as a transport waterway by British explorers and missionaries going to Malawi a century and a half ago. As recently as the 1970s, it was used for transporting molasses from Malawi to the port of Chinde, in Mozambique. The idea is to reopen the waterway in order to reduce substantially import and export transport costs and thereby stimulate economic development in the three countries and beyond. The waterway is intended to supplement existing transport corridors to the ports of Nacala and Beira, in Mozambique, and the port of Dar-es-Salaam, in Tanzania.

The waterway project is in line with the Almaty Programme of Action, as well as the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries, both of which aim to address the special needs of landlocked developing countries and least developed countries such as Malawi. It is also in line with the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which recognizes infrastructure development as one of the major pillars for economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa and for reducing Africa's economic marginalization. Furthermore, in addition to NEPAD, the Southern African Development Community and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa support the Shire-Zambezi Waterway Project as a priority programme that needs to be integrated into the surface transport networks in the subregion and the maritime regime of the Indian Ocean. Accordingly, we urge the international community to support the Shire-Zambezi waterway initiative.

As we take stock of the past five years, we urge the United Nations to consider the project as an example of the efforts being made to implement the Almaty Programme of Action and to assist in the mobilization of financing for its implementation. Indeed, while Malawi recognizes that national Governments have the primary responsibility for their countries' economic and social development, we also believe that the international community must ensure the success of excellent initiatives such as the Shire-Zambezi Waterway Project. That project will boost the economic advancement of millions of people in our subregion, the majority of whom are women, who depend wholly on agriculture for their survival.

While Malawi agrees that tangible progress has been made globally in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, landlocked developing countries continue to faces challenges. More needs to be done, not only to provide transport infrastructure but also to help to improve transport networks in landlocked developing countries. Accordingly, we support the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report contained in document A/63/165. Among other things, the report calls on the international community to provide greater market access for goods originating in landlocked developing countries so as to mitigate the high trade transaction costs stemming from their geographical disadvantages, and to increase technical assistance to landlocked developing countries to ensure their effective participation in the World Trade Organization's trade negotiations. In that regard, we wish to urge the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States to take the lead in ensuring the implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

Before I conclude, let me put on record Malawi's appreciation for the cooperation it receives from Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa in placing their seaports at the disposal of Malawi. Malawi is also grateful to Zambia and Zimbabwe, themselves landlocked developing countries, for facilitating the passage of Malawi's imports and exports through their

territories. That cooperation is a manifestation of the partnerships envisaged by the Almaty Programme of Action. It must not only be encouraged but also supported technically and financially by the international community.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Michel Kafando, chair of the delegation of Burkina Faso.

**Mr. Kafando** (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I should like to express my delegation's satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, presiding over this high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. My delegation would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the excellent organization of this debate and the interest he has shown in the concerns of landlocked developing countries. My delegation also welcomes the efforts of Mr. Cheikh Diarra, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. We would also like to associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Mali on behalf of landlocked developing countries, and the statement delivered at the 18th meeting by the Chairman of the Group of 77.

The year 2008 has produced unprecedented socio-economic crises, in particular as regards oil prices, the spike in the price of food products, the rise in the cost of energy resources and the disastrous effects of natural catastrophes. They have shaken the world economy, but they have a more serious impact on landlocked developing countries. The total or partial deterioration of transport infrastructure and the geographical distance from the sea of landlocked development countries are responsible for serious disruptions in our trade, inter alia, as a result of the long time required to transport goods and, above all, the prohibitive cost of the transport itself.

The inherent problems of landlocked developing countries are major concerns of the Almaty Programme of Action. I believe that this meeting is an opportunity for the international community to carry out a midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action. We are pleased that the review has benefited from the conclusions of the thematic ministerial meetings held in June 2007 at Ouagadougou, on transit transport infrastructure development, and in August 2007 at Ulaanbaatar, on international trade and trade facilitation. Those two preparatory meetings have enabled us to evaluate the implementation of the Programme's crucial elements, identify the best steps to address the consequences of the physical isolation of landlocked countries and determine how to improve the competitiveness of their economies.

My delegation is pleased with the relevance of the theme of this meeting, which asks the entire international community to consider its role in the establishment of transit transport systems in order to increase opportunities for trade between countries in the interior and the rest of the world.

Infrastructure funding is of crucial importance for the success of the Almaty Programme of Action. Mobilizing investment in transport and transit requires the involvement of the private sector and bilateral and multilateral financial partners. A genuine national, subregional, regional and international partnership based on the specific needs of landlocked countries should bring us all together through predictable and sizeable funding mechanisms to build and rehabilitate transport and transit infrastructure and to strengthen international frameworks for the promotion of trade.

My delegation calls on developed countries, especially the members of the Group of Eight, to become genuinely involved in the preparatory process for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development, which is scheduled to be held at Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008, in order to carry out an objective review of the commitments entered into at Monterrey in 2002.

Half the landlocked developing countries are in Africa, where the level of development of the road network is the worst in the world — twice as bad as in Latin America and three times as in Asia. Given that challenge, African countries have made an absolute priority of building road, railway and airport infrastructure. The recent thematic ministerial meeting at Ouagadougou supported and encouraged Africa's infrastructure development strategy and launched an urgent appeal to public and private investors alike to fund infrastructure and facilitate trade.

Trade continues to be among the most important engines of development in developing countries, especially in landlocked countries. My delegation is concerned about the recent failures in multilateral trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization. The lack of consensus at that level is a clear illustration of the marginalization of poor developing countries in

international trade. Burkina Faso calls for a resumption of those negotiations in a spirit of consensus and international solidarity to establish fair rules and conditions that favour equitable and profitable trade for all.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aldo Mantovani, the representative of Italy.

**Mr. Mantovani** (Italy): Allow me to begin by endorsing the statement delivered by the representative of France at the 18th meeting in his country's capacity as presidency of the European Union.

Italy wishes to thank landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries for preparing this midterm review of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, at both the national and regional levels. We also join other delegations in expressing our appreciation to Ambassador Takasu, for successfully facilitating the negotiations on the draft final document, and Mr. Cheikh Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, for the support his Office provided to the entire preparation process of the midterm review.

When the Italian Parliament revised the legal basis for our development cooperation in 1989, it listed among its priorities the consolidation of local development processes in the world's poorest countries and fostering their economic, social and cultural growth. For 20 years, that goal has remained at the heart of our activities. That is why Italy welcomed and continues to endorse the philosophy that led to the adoption of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Between 2003 and 2008 Italy's overall development aid in favour of landlocked developing countries increased by about 70 per cent, for a total of approximately $250 million. Last year, we also contributed $50,000 to the organization of the two preparatory meetings in Ulaanbaatar and Ouagadougou.

The obstacles that Governments of landlocked developing countries and transit developing countries must overcome are related not so much to their geographical location as to complex regulatory procedures, lack of cooperation in tackling bureaucratic delays and an underdeveloped logistics sector. Significant efforts have been made in the past five years, thanks to the Almaty framework, but we still have a long road ahead of us.

Regional and subregional cooperation is also an important means of implementing the Almaty Programme, and the relevant regional and subregional organizations, especially those conducting operational activities on the ground, are important stakeholders. Their continued interest and commitment is essential to achieving concrete progress in the implementation of the five priorities laid down at Almaty.

Italy remains as ready as ever to facilitate that process. We reaffirm our commitment to improving the performance of our bilateral assistance in that sector. At the same time, we are consistently engaged in improving the impact of those activities and in increasing funding for them.

Allow me to mention two major actions by Italy to implement the Almaty goals. First, we have made a total contribution of approximately €100 million, equivalent to $140 million, to the Government of Afghanistan for the rehabilitation and the partial reconstruction of the Kabul-Bamyan highway. That initiative seeks to substantially improve the connection between two major cities, reducing transit costs and times both within Afghanistan and between Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. The project will also help to improve the operational capability of local institutions in charge of monitoring the quality of the extra-urban transportation system.

The second action is the rehabilitation of the Toledo-Ancaravi section of the Oruro-Pisiga highway in Bolivia, which Italy financed through a $25 million soft loan. That project constitutes a major expansion of Bolivia's road infrastructure and will bring much-needed economic progress to one of the poorest and most sparsely populated areas of the country.

Italy is willing to encourage its multilateral partners to step up their involvement in this area. International financial institutions in particular have a real comparative advantage to provide landlocked developing countries with the financial assistance needed to support their costly investments in infrastructure development and maintenance.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals requires resource mobilization and exchanges of experiences among all partners, at both the institutional and private levels. Italy is convinced that the

contribution of the private sector is crucial to the development of infrastructure and productive capacity. It must be increased through the creation of public-private partnerships.

The incoming Italian presidency of the Group of 8 will pay great attention to information and communication technology for development. The development of transit transport infrastructure is not limited to the construction and maintenance of physical infrastructure such as roads, railways, airports, ports, pipelines and so on. Instead, physical infrastructure needs to be complemented by an efficient and modern storage and transport organization, logistics management systems and integrated information and communication networks.

Bridging the digital divide, promoting good governance, exchanging experiences and best practices and proper training and education in landlocked and transit developing countries are consistent with priority 1 of the Almaty Programme of Action. In that regard, Italy will promote projects fostering the dissemination of e-government instruments aimed at improving and speeding up complicated bureaucratic procedures — for instance, in the field of customs and logistics.

Italy is keen to discuss with partners the further development of those initiatives and the development of strategies for their implementation that involve the private sector and all major stakeholders.

Italy is ready to do its part to help landlocked and transit developing countries. At the same time, we expect developing countries to continue to assume ownership and to design appropriate national policies in the framework of agreed regional initiatives. We are confident that, together, we will succeed.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Eshagh Al Habib, the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Al Habib** (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the very outset, please allow me to congratulate the President for convening such a timely meeting. I am confident that under his able leadership, the high-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action will achieve a fruitful outcome. I should also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his introductory remarks at the 17th meeting. Our thanks and appreciation also go to the Secretariat for its preparation and provision of a document for this meeting.

Transit and transport issues are of great importance, especially in today's globalized world. It is believed that transit transport development equals economic growth, leading to poverty alleviation, which is the first priority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In that regard, the establishment of effective and efficient transit systems is the top priority of both landlocked and transit developing countries, bearing in mind that the primary responsibility for establishing effective transit systems rests with landlocked and transit developing countries seeking to create conditions in which resources can be generated, attracted and effectively mobilized to address their development challenges. But their endeavours and cooperation also need to be supported by development partners and international and regional organizations in a spirit of shared responsibility.

Furthermore, strengthening the legal framework governing transit transport operations — including through the full and effective implementation of bilateral, subregional and regional agreements — prepared effective plans to achieve our goals and expedite the process. The Almaty Programme of Action therefore constitutes a fundamental framework for genuine partnership between landlocked and transit developing countries and their development partners at the national, bilateral, subregional, regional and global levels.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has undertaken many initiatives, especially in following up and speeding up the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action to facilitate transit transport, in line with promoting lessons learned from existing regional infrastructure initiatives to encourage integrated cross-border infrastructure investment. This year, Iran and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific have jointly organized two workshops focused on the facilitation of rail and road transit transport. Iran is also on the verge of accession to the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, which aims to promote and facilitate transit transport in order to effectively implement trade facilitation measures, including the implementation of regional customs transit schemes.

With regard to successfully implementing an automated system for customs data, Iran is now making

efforts to continue to implement such a system in order to ease customs formalities. We are also considering the possibility of negotiating and granting duty-free zones and maritime ports.

In 2008 at Tehran, Iran also held an international travel and transit and east-west corridor seminar, at which it introduced to the world the Chabahar free trade zone and east-west corridor.

As one of the most important transit developing countries, due to its specific geographical position, the Islamic Republic of Iran is host to very important multimodal transportation routes whose development and maintenance pose great challenges. If those concerns and challenges are not addressed, they may hamper cooperation among transit developing countries and landlocked developing countries. Moreover, the development and maintenance of infrastructure require a greater share of the investment and financial assistance from donors, international financial institutions and development assistance agencies.

I recognize, in conclusion, that addressing the transit transport challenges of developing countries requires a holistic approach, and I invite all of the relevant organizations of the United Nations system — including the regional commissions, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development — and other international and regional organizations to further integrate the Almaty Programme of Action into their relevant programmes of work, taking into account this midterm review. I encourage them, within their respective mandates, to continue their support to the landlocked and transit developing countries, inter alia, through well-coordinated and coherent technical assistance programmes in transit transport and trade facilitation.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Viktor I. Zagrekov of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

**Mr. Zagrekov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Globalization is having an ever-greater impact on all aspects of world society. However, the current uneven distribution of its benefits brings with it the risk of social and economic upheavals and the division of the world economy into areas of growth and areas of stagnation. We know that developing and landlocked countries are especially vulnerable in such a situation.

In that regard, Russia has taken active steps to implement the Almaty Programme of Action, which was adopted five years ago and focuses on implementing a complex set of measures to develop transit shipments. We also fully endorse the development of a scheme for a Eurasian transport system on the basis of the Almaty Programme of Action. We believe that that will provide a solid platform for dealing with key transport issues in the coming decade.

In accordance with the Almaty Programme of Action, the steps taken by the Russian Federation in recent years have focused on improving the national transport policy aimed at developing transit shipments, strengthening transport infrastructure of international importance and activating cooperation with business groups through the execution of various projects involving, inter alia, State-private partnerships.

Our key guideline in this effort has been the Federal Programme on the development of the transport system of the Russian Federation and its subprogramme on developing the export of transport services, which seeks to establish an effective transport infrastructure that would increase the competitiveness of the Russian transport system and realize the country's transport potential.

The Programme includes measures to prepare and implement large complex investment projects aimed at developing the main freight and passenger transport corridors with a view to improving the quality of transport services, speeding up deliveries and improving the management of transport. The main job we face is to enable the containerization of freight and attract transit flows to international transport corridors that pass through the Russian Federation.

Russia's geographical situation plays an important role in determining our development strategy and policies. Russia occupies the central portion of the Eurasian Continent and it is our destiny to act as a geopolitical bridge between Eastern and Western countries. In that connection we participate actively in the international dialogue on transport issues as they are being negotiated both in Europe and in Asia.

We support implementation of the comprehensive Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development Project of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), which includes development of the Asian highway network and the

trans-Asian railway system. The Russian Federation is a party to the Intergovernmental Agreements worked out by ESCAP on the Asian road and railway networks, and we are convinced that their implementation will lead to significant benefits for developing and landlocked countries as well as for developing transit States.

One important element of transport policy that will certainly have a significant effect on landlocked transit countries in Central Asia is the adoption in January 2008 of the scheme for a single transport space within the Eurasian Economic Community. The scheme, in whose preparation Russia played an active role, calls for the development of the overall transport capacities of all member States, the elimination of barriers hampering international shipments, joint expansion of the access of the carriers of member States to international transport markets and the development of transport infrastructure. We have also undertaken regular demonstration runs of container trains linking Europe and Asia. Starting in 2002, such demonstration runs have been carried out on various routes from eastern ports of Russia, Mongolia, China, Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan to the Russian borders with countries of Eastern and Northern Europe. The purpose of those runs has been not only to demonstrate the advantages of the land route over the sea route but also to find bottlenecks so that they can be eliminated.

We should also mention a joint ESCAP-Economic Commission for Europe project to develop Eurasian transport links, which seeks to identify the most important railway, automobile and internal watercourse routes linking the countries of Asia and Europe. The project will determine priority means of improving those routes, including measures to eliminate gaps and bottlenecks, simplify border formalities, eliminate barriers and develop ways to ensure uninterrupted use of those routes for freight transport between Europe and Asia.

Significant work has been devoted to the new Eurasian road transport initiative, a project being carried out by the International Road Transport Union aimed at providing for regular road shipment between Asia and Europe.

In conclusion, I want to say that we are very happy with the work carried out by countries and international organizations, especially United Nations agencies, in the framework of the Almaty Programme of Action. We wish again to reconfirm Russia's commitment to the main goal of that programme, namely, meeting the needs of landlocked countries through the creation of global frameworks for action to establish effective transit shipment systems.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Oumar Daou, chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Mali.

**Mr. Daou** (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to welcome the convening of this important meeting. I should like to share the experience of my own country, Mali, within the framework of the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Mali, with seven land borders, is a perfect example of a landlocked developing country (LLDC). Our remoteness from the sea is a serious obstacle to the provision of necessary supplies and creates transportation costs that diminish the value and thus the competitiveness of our export products. Our geographical location also explains the vulnerability of Mali's economy, especially during this time of crisis.

With reference to the report of the Secretary-General of 23 July 2008 (A/63/165), I wish to focus on Mali's activities in implementing some of the priorities mentioned in the report. I turn first to fundamental issues linked to transit policy; I wish to note that Mali has taken a number of substantial measures, including in improving the effectiveness of transit transport operations and to reduce transport costs by enhancing the storage capacity of warehouses at transit points.

A number of measures have been taken including the establishment of the protocol agreement for the maritime, road and railroad transport and transit of Malian merchandise. Mali has also organized the private sector into federations including the establishment of the Mali Shippers Council and the Malian Road Transport Council.

Turning to the important area of the development and maintenance of transport and transit infrastructure, Mali has adopted a policy of promoting private investment in the areas of equipment and transport and storage facilities. We have carried out transport infrastructure work to improve access to all transport and transit ports. We have also upgraded our rail and road transport infrastructure. In order to facilitate trade, the self-assessment methodology established by

the World Bank and the agencies of the United Nations system is being used.

Overall, although relevant actions have been undertaken, transit transport is still coming up against certain hurdles, including the many control points on inter-State routes and numerous tariff and non-tariff barriers. These considerably impede trade and raise overhead costs for our goods.

Another problem is the lack or insufficiency of transit transport infrastructure, which has obliged us to set up adjacent or joint inspection posts at the borders. Information systems are poorly adapted to the merchandise, training for those working in the sector is inadequate, and the storage capacity of Malian warehouses at transit ports is low.

Faced with these numerous challenges and hurdles on the path of development, Mali has undertaken, in the context of its statement of overall transport policy, a number of actions aimed at improving the transport sector, through its Transport Sector Project, including the following.

Firstly, we have enhanced performance and management capacities of the sector by reorganizing and building local capacity, through the aforementioned establishment of the Malian Shippers Council and the Malian Road Transport Council.

Secondly, we have restructured transport companies and have reviewed the institutional and regulatory framework in order to further involve the private sector. Finally, we have upgraded and maintained our priority transport infrastructure through establishment of the National Transport Facilitation Committee, the Road Safety Committee and the Agency for Road Traffic Safety. Additionally, we have declared a National Road Safety Week and have put in place the Inter-State Road Transit programme.

Mali remains convinced that the development of landlocked developing countries must be based on cooperation. This is why Mali supports the major programmes for developing transport within the framework of the West African Economic Monetary and Economic Union and the Economic Community of West African States. The adoption of a programme for landlocked countries is an opportunity we must seize in order to work with our development partners to find the financing needed to build and improve the infrastructure necessary for the development of our country.

In that connection, I would like to recall the commitment of my country to be involved in activities aimed at the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. This commitment is demonstrated by our active presence in relevant forums and by the implementation at the national level of all of the Programme's recommendations. This is why the President of the Republic of Mali through his special envoy, the Minister of Equipment and Transport, has conveyed his warm greetings to this Assembly.

Before concluding, I would also like to convey to the entire United Nations family our sincere greetings and thanks. I would be remiss if I did not also greet and thank the High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and Small Island Developing States for his remarkable work in coordinating all of these activities within the framework of the current review.

I would also like to thank Mr. Habib Ouane, Director of the Division for Africa, LDCs and Special Programmes of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, for his pertinent analysis and suggestions which will be extremely useful for the realization of the second phase of the Almaty Programme of Action.

Finally, I wish to sincerely thank Japan for the invaluable role it has played in the negotiations that today have enabled us to make progress in the implementation of the Programme.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, chairman of the delegation of Egypt.

**Mr. Abdelaziz** (Egypt): At the outset, I would like to thank you the President of the General Assembly for convening this important and timely meeting to review the needs and challenges of landlocked countries and to express our appreciation to Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States, and to his skilled team for the excellent work they are doing and for their efforts in making this review meeting a success.

Egypt associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The Almaty Programme of Action represents a significant landmark in the recognition of the special needs and problems of LLDCs. The midterm review provides an opportunity to assess the progress made so far in the implementation of the specific actions according to the five priorities agreed upon in the Almaty Programme of Action.

In this context, I would like to highlight some points aimed at enhancing the ability of the landlocked developing countries to become effective partners in international development activities. Special attention should be given to the needs of landlocked developing countries in the Doha trade negotiations to enhance their role in international trade system and to push forward their development efforts. There is also a need to attract private investment, including foreign direct investment. In that regard, private sector participation, through co-financing, can play a catalytic role.

Egypt welcomes the proposal by His Excellency the President of Mongolia to set up in Ulaanbaatar an international think tank to enhance the analytical capability of landlocked developing countries needed to maximize the efficiency of our coordinated efforts for the effective implementation of internationally agreed provisions, particularly the Almaty Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, we urge international organizations and donor countries to assist in making that initiative a reality.

Efforts to facilitate the transfer of technologies related to transit transport systems, including information and communication technology, are also needed by landlocked developing countries. We also encourage the strengthening of South-South cooperation and trilateral cooperation with the involvement of donors, as well as cooperation among subregional and regional organizations in support of landlocked and transit developing countries towards the full and effective implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

As the current global crises — food, energy, climate and finance, and maybe others — will compound the challenges to the development objectives of LLDCs and will constrain national efforts to advance implementation of the Programme, a robust and proactive initiative, including a doubling of efforts and resources on the part of all development partners in support of LLDCs will be required.

Progressive measures are also needed to address the long-standing barriers to development, such as international trade barriers, the lack of resources for investing in infrastructure and weak international support measures. We encourage developed countries to deliver on their commitments to provide 0.15 per cent to 0.20 per cent of their gross national income to official development assistance in order to maintain sufficient levels of assistance to the LLDCs.

Egypt has always been keen to strengthen its relations with all developing countries and to establish relations on the basis of mutual respect, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence. In that context, Egypt has established two funds as part of Egypt's foreign policy mechanism for supporting and strengthening South-South cooperation within its existing resources. The funds are the Egyptian Fund for Technical Cooperation with Africa, which provides assistance for African countries, and the Egyptian Fund for Technical Cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States, which has been modified to include other developing countries, in particular LLDCs. We are in the process of expanding the funds' activities within those countries.

Egypt accords great attention to the role of the funds, providing training courses and expertise commensurate with the needs of those countries and providing assistance in building capacity and providing better services in the implementation of their national development strategies. Trilateral cooperation is an integral part of the funds' activities, together with cooperation with various United Nations bodies and donor countries aimed at enhancing the resources available for developing countries and enabling them to benefit from Egyptian expertise in various areas. The funds also provide humanitarian assistance in response to appeals from United Nations bodies.

Several Egyptian companies have taken a leading role in directing investments to the infrastructure sector, particularly telecommunications and construction, in landlocked developing countries, and we will enhance that role within the public-private partnership in the Egyptian system.

Finally, Egypt welcomes the draft declaration (A/63/L.3) resulting from the midterm review and

would like to thank Ambassador Takasu of Japan for his efforts in that regard. We remain committed to continuing to strengthen and safeguard the interests of the developing world — in particular, the interests of landlocked developing countries, least developed countries, small island developing States and Africa — in view of the mounting challenges facing developing countries. Those challenges require unity and solidarity through the United Nations.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Armen Martirosyan, chairman of the delegation of Armenia.

**Mr. Martirosyan** (Armenia): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the organizers of this plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ambassador Takasu, Permanent Representative of Japan, in facilitating the negotiations on the draft outcome document (A/63/L.3), which concluded last month.

Any programme is only as good as its realization, and the Almaty Programme of Action is no exception. I should like to share with the Assembly Armenia's views on some of the issues related to the Programme of Action. It is our strong belief that the international community should adopt effective measures to eliminate the use of unilateral coercive economic measures, particularly against landlocked developing countries. Such actions contradict the recognized principles of international law and, in addition to undermining the multilateral trading system, have a negative impact on international and regional economic cooperation. The interests and concerns of landlocked countries should be taken fully into account while establishing new transit transport systems, as stipulated in paragraph 8 of the Almaty Programme of Action. The formulation and implementation of any divisive initiative would run counter to the Almaty Programme of Action and would only add to the tension in volatile regions such as the South Caucasus.

Regional and subregional cooperation play an important role in successfully addressing the specific problems of transit transportation. In that context, as stated in the Almaty Programme of Action,

> "support from all existing sources, where requested, for mechanisms of regional and subregional dialogue and regional integration among landlocked and transit countries, is important". (*A/CONF.202/3, annex I, para. 9*)

We also believe that the landlocked countries should be assisted in the area of trade facilitation and that relevant instruments should be adopted within the framework of the World Trade Organization.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action, we would like to make a number of proposals that, we believe, would ensure the effectiveness of the Programme. We deem it necessary to take the following actions.

First, we should promote the use and further development of existing transport infrastructures in the landlocked developing countries, ensuring their sustainable integration into international transport corridors and related regional developments, which in turn would ensure access to the high seas. Secondly, we should thoroughly consider the interests of the landlocked countries when formulating development plans for sea motorways and ports. Thirdly, we should create favourable conditions for the presence of landlocked developing countries with regard to ports, maritime infrastructures and maritime transport vehicles. With a view to the implementation of those proposals, the international financial institutions should be urged to provide grants and long-term loans under favourable conditions to those interested in promoting the attainment of those objectives.

The Almaty Programme of Action has demonstrated its timeliness and comprehensiveness. We believe that, through joint effort, we will produce new tangible results to be assessed at the next midterm review.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 62/76 of 6 December 2007, I now call on the observer for the Eurasian Development Bank.

**Mr. Finogenov** (Eurasian Development Bank) (*spoke in Russian*): The Eurasian Development Bank is the youngest in the family of international development banks. The Bank, established in 2006 under an initiative of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, is an international financing institution that promotes the market economies of its members. The Bank also promotes the economic development of its members and strengthening their trade and economic links through investment activities. The Eurasian

Development Bank is open to new members. We expect that Belarus, Armenia and Tajikistan will join us by the end of the year, and we hope to see our membership continue to increase.

From the outset we have placed priority in our investment activities on innovation in transport, infrastructure, energy, high technology and other innovative fields. The Almaty Programme of Action pays particular attention to these fields, and its aim is to help landlocked countries, which, in our case, are Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Bank is currently considering projects worth over $5 billion and is contributing more than $2 billion of their total cost. In the transport infrastructure field, we are considering a project to build a waterway connecting the Caspian Sea to the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, based on initiatives put forward by the Russian and Kazakh Presidents. The Bank can also contribute to a transport corridor between Western Europe and western China and between the North and South.

We are paying specific attention to projects linked to the use of waterways in Central Asia and to the exploitation of their hydroelectric potential. The Eurasian Development Bank acknowledges the importance of hydroelectric resources and is now developing its participation in hydroelectric projects in Central Asia, which will take into account the balance of interests of these countries and will give an additional push to the integration processes in those countries.

The Bank works on the assumption that any project in this area needs to be based on consensus among the countries in the region, bearing in mind the interests of the countries that are downstream and upstream along such transnational rivers. Here, we are also using the experience in watercourse management gained by various countries and the specialized agencies of the United Nations. Of special importance in the Bank's activities is the issue of enhancing partnership relations with international organizations and financial institutions. The observer status in the General Assembly, which the Eurasian Development Bank obtained in 2007, gives it new opportunities to promote multilateral cooperation, to enhance our participation on the international front, and to make direct contact with United Nations agencies and regional commissions. These include the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

The elucidation of mutual interests and the expansion of cooperation among countries, international and national organizations and the Bank are of vital importance. This gives us a better opportunity to coordinate our activities, to be more effective in our projects and, at the end of the day, to improve the lives of the citizens of our countries. We are open to working with the United Nations Organization and with the international community, as a whole, to strengthen the integration process and to promote development in the Eurasian area.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with resolution 48/5 adopted by the General Assembly on 13 October 1993, I would like to give the floor to the representative of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

**Mr. Baltes** (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe): On behalf of the Secretary-General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), I would like to express my gratitude to His Excellency Cheick Sidi Diarra, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, for inviting us to participate in this high-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action.

*The President returned to the Chair.*

The OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization and cooperates with the United Nations under Chapter VIII of the Charter. With 56 participating States from Europe, Central Asia and North America, our organization is a primary instrument for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. While our headquarters with the permanent representations of the participating States and the Secretariat are in Vienna, Austria, we also work through 19 field presences throughout South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The OSCE, using a comprehensive approach, deals with three dimensions of security — the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the

human. It therefore addresses a wide range of security-related concerns, including arms control, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights, national minorities, democratization, policing strategies, counter-terrorism and economic and environmental aspects of security. All 56 participating States enjoy equal status, and decisions are taken by consensus.

Since 2006, under Belgian chairmanship, the OSCE has given particular emphasis to the development of transit transportation. Its high-level annual Economic Forum in May 2006 was dedicated to transportation in the OSCE area, including secure transportation networks and transport development, with a view to enhancing regional economic cooperation and stability.

It became very clear during the Forum process that special attention needed to be given to the challenges of OSCE landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) — particularly in Central Asia, the South Caucasus and adjacent regions. At the concluding session, the five Central Asian participating States issued a joint statement in which they highlighted the indivisible link between trade and transport and emphasized that the absence of territorial access to the sea and high transit costs imposed serious restrictions on their socio-economic development.

Based on the statement and on the recommendations of the Forum, the 56 OSCE participating States adopted, at the Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels in December 2006, decision No. 11/06 on the future transport dialogue in the OSCE. The decision supports the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action and provides our organization with a strong mandate for continued activities in cooperation with the United Nations.

Pursuant to this adoption, my Office, together with the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States and with the support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, organized a conference on trans-Asian and Eurasian transit transport development through Central Asia in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. This conference brought together ministers and senior officials from customs, transport and trade ministries from LLDCs in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, as well as senior representatives from various international organizations, some of whom are with us today.

The conference was an important step in raising awareness and enhancing political dialogue on the development of transit transportation in and through Central Asia, including Afghanistan and Mongolia, and in taking stock of the progress made in the implementation of the Programme of Action, thereby substantially contributing to its current midterm review.

Following the conference deliberations, a joint Dushanbe statement was agreed upon by the delegations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Mongolia. The text of the statement covers, inter alia, key issues related to fundamental transit transport policies; transport infrastructure development and maintenance; trade, transit and transport facilitation and public private partnerships.

Finally, and this is an element I would like to emphasize, the joint Dushanbe statement highlights the importance of building partnerships, partnerships not only between OSCE LLDCs and their transit neighbours, but also between landlocked countries and other members of the international community. When it comes to forging these partnerships, the OSCE stands ready to play its role as a catalyst, a platform and a forum for bringing together various stakeholders.

As a follow-up, this year's meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum under Finnish Chairmanship focused on maritime and inland waterways cooperation in the OSCE area, in particular on increasing security and protecting the environment. In this context, we examined the issue of transit transportation and revisited the challenges faced by LLDCs, thereby building further on the conclusions and recommendations of previous meetings.

Let me end by assuring you once again of the continued involvement of the OSCE in transport-related activities. In this regard, we will continue to play the role of a facilitator and political catalyst, offering a platform for dialogue and cooperation among our participating States and all stakeholders concerned. Whereas we are not a technical reference organization, our organization is nonetheless well placed to raise political awareness and to foster transnational cooperation between countries. Political dialogue and regional cooperation are the niches where

the OSCE can add value to already existing structures, processes and coordination mechanisms.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker at this high-level meeting.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/63/L.3*, entitled "Outcome document of the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action: Addressing the Special Needs of Landlocked Developing Countries within a New Global Framework for Transit Transport Cooperation for Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries".

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/63/L.3*?

*Draft resolution A/63/L.3* was adopted* (resolution 63/2).

**The President**: I am very pleased that we have concluded this high-level plenary meeting on the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. As President, I am particularly gratified that this review should have taken place within the General Assembly framework.

Over the past two days, we have been assessing the multifaceted efforts to ensure that landlocked developing countries have efficient transit transport systems to access international markets. We have adopted the Declaration on the midterm review by acclamation. It is a balanced and precise document, which provides the guidance that will enhance the rate of implementation of further projects.

Our focus on action-oriented programmes that are both measurable and feasible has grounded the review in terms that will benefit landlocked and transit countries alike. It also serves to inspire greater donor involvement in the range of needed improvements, from trade assistance policy to infrastructure, from technical and financial assistance to monitoring and follow-up.

In particular, the high-level panel on the role of international support for the development of transport systems to enhance trade opportunities provided a dynamic exchange on those complex issues. Stakeholder representatives from landlocked and transit countries, donor countries, regional and international organizations and financial institutions provided insights into the key partnerships that are emerging from the Programme of Action. We thank all delegations for their valuable input. We now have a clear assessment of where we stand after five years of work.

The United Nations is all about partnerships. I believe that the work orchestrated by the Almaty Programme of Action is a good example of what we can accomplish when we are guided by clear directives and strong leadership within the context of good-faith cooperation. Clearly, a key element in the success of the review is its emphasis on measurable results and the importance of monitoring progress within the five stated priorities of the Programme.

As the leaders of so many Member States said during the general debate in recent weeks, there is concern that the current financial crisis threatens to cripple world trade. A global recession would be doubly catastrophic for the least developed countries that are not only poor, but geographically isolated as well.

I reiterate my concern and my promise that the General Assembly will use all its authority to ensure that the commitments of donor countries to provide funding and needed technology transfers are honoured. I believe there is goodwill, but we must be vigilant as we monitor progress in the difficult months and years ahead.

If the United Nations is all about partnerships, then let us recognize the central role of solidarity in assisting each other as partners and as countries. We face so many obstacles to realizing the shared goal of ending poverty and sharing prosperity among peoples. The work outlined in the Almaty review document is ambitious, but inspired by our sense of solidarity with the peoples of the landlocked countries and their neighbours, we can see that the way is clear and the possibilities endless.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

The General Assembly has thus concluded the high-level meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. The Assembly has also thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 52.

*The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.*